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SUBJECT: AMB. BLEICH TALKS WITH STUDENTS ON WATER, CLIMATE LINKS

REF: SECSTATE 123998

¶1. (U) Ambassador Bleich marked the first day of the Copenhagen climate change conference (reftel) with a youth and environmental outreach event at the National Museum of Australia. The museum is hosting an exhibit, titled "Water H2O=Life," based on an exhibit by the American Museum of National History. The Ambassador met with a class of 24 students (ages 13-15 years) from a local Canberra public high school who are studying climate change and accompanied them as they viewed the exhibit, answering their questions on U.S. and Australian climate change policies.

¶2. (U) At the conclusion of the student event, the Ambassador took questions from the Australian media on the climate change talks in Copenhagen and the recent defeat of PM Rudd's climate change legislation here. The Ambassador noted the significant changes that have occurred globally in support of an agreement, including commitments by major developing countries to do more. Ambassador Bleich characterized the recent Senate vote against national cap-and-trade legislation in Australia as a "delay, not a defeat" in government action on climate.

¶3. (U) The Ambassador is keen to engage young people and the public early to reinforce the message that President Obama and the Administration are committed to meeting the environmental challenges facing the planet. This event was especially timely given the close association in Australia between water and climate change and increased public focus on climate change around the Copenhagen conference. This event, the first of several public outreach events where climate change will be a topic, supports MSP Goal 2 - Safeguarding Our Future: Combating Climate Change, Managing Water and Scientific Cooperation.

BLEICH